Remote Working Advice Toolkit

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Contents:

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Key Drivers for Remote Working

Some things to bear in mind…

- Remote working may, at times, be essential. For a variety of reasons (weather related, health related, or other practical barriers) teams may be forced to work away from their normal place of work. This may include the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, for example.

- It is critical that these challenges do not interrupt the effectiveness and productivity of your business.

- Remote working can have positive benefits for you and your staff and stakeholders.

- This tool-kit provides guidance on best practice for remote working. We hope it helps you to set up strong systems and processes, enabling you and your colleagues to succeed.

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Did you know that…

80% of employees say remote working makes a difference to their working life.

londonlovesbusiness.com

92% of employees say working from home makes them more productive.

londonlovesbusiness.com

The UK could save:

£ **£4 billion** in travel

533 million hours of commuting time

londonlovesbusiness.com

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Did you know that…

82% of managers found flexible working led to better staff retention.

londonlovesbusiness.com

38% of employees say flexible working makes them more creative.

londonlovesbusiness.com

62% of managers found flexible working helped them respond better to customer needs.

londonlovesbusiness.com

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But, we are better together…

Research shows that simply feeling like you are part of a team when working on a task can make you more motivated to take on challenges. In a study by Stanford, participants who were primed to act collaboratively stuck at their task **64%** longer than their solitary peers, whilst also reporting higher engagement levels, lower fatigue levels and a higher success rate.

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Process Considerations

Define Work Systems

Staff have different ways of going about tasks.

It is important to set standards as it can shorten the time needed to achieve the desired results.

By setting standards and defining repeatable work systems, the team has generally less questions and gets a feeling for how long certain tasks should take.

Best Practice: Encourage staff to share their best practice for key processes. Create a simple document and with all staff.

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Have clear and detailed deliverables

Provide more detailed descriptions of the tasks as well as examples of final-result expectations.

Give the team freedom to execute, but with more instructions on how to deal with the tasks.

Best Practice: Encourage staff to list their planned actions in their calendar for that day. Spend time with your staff each day to go through their task list and talk through the expectations of each task.

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Schedule Regular Meetings

Scheduling briefings and meetings with staff at the same time on the same weekday contributes to creating a routine.

Routines provide the team with something they are used to and familiar with. That in return puts the team at ease and reduces stress.

Best Practice: video calls are one of the best ways to maximize efficiency because they recreate the routine office feeling remote teams are missing out on.

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Agree Regular Work hours

Whilst 9-5 won't be for all staff, many staff will need to support childcare or caring responsibilities.

Agree with each staff member a regular pattern of work. It could be in the form of split hours to cover child care commitments.

Best Practice: Have at least three to four hours a day where most of the team is online at the same time. It helps people to complete tasks and keeps team morale high.

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Information Sharing - Best Practice

Remind staff around information:

- Remember not to download any information onto home computers
- Use **WIN + L** to lock your screen whenever you leave your device
- Lock away any paperwork at the end of the day or when you leave the house
- Do not create local copies of personal or sensitive data, even if it is to work on temporarily

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Maintaining Professional Standards

Establish the ground rules:

- Dress as if you are coming into work
- Establish your routine and stick to it wherever possible
- Let your manager know when you are at work and when you are not
- Take a lunch break and regular breaks
- Schedule regular catch up calls with colleagues
- Increase frequency of calls and support for all staff

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Technology Considerations

Hardware

Staff should have access to a **business provided laptop**. Where this is not possible immediately, any new procurement required as a result should be treated as a priority.

As many remote communication and productivity tools now operate via a browser it is possible for staff to utilise personal laptops in the short-term. Where businesses adopt this short-term approach any work-related activity should remain purely browser based (via Google Chrome, Edge, Firefox etc.) only.

Best practice: Staff should be reminded of data protection and GDPR policies in place and should not download business data to a personal device.

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Telephony & Voice Over IP

Your organization may be using a VOIP (Voice over IP) for internal/external telephone calls. Where this is the case there are free SIP phone apps available that staff can download to their smart phone or laptop. This enables staff to receive external business calls at home as if in the office.

Zoiper is a free solution available across Windows, Mac, iOS and Android.

Where not currently using a VOIP service office hunt groups should be extended to include staff mobile phones.

 Best practice: Staff should be reminded of data protection and GDPR policies in place and should not download business data to a personal device.

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Communication tools

Free: [Zoom](), [Adobe Acrobat Connect](), [GoToMeeting]()

Included in Software packages: [Microsoft Teams](), [Google Hangouts Meet](), and [WebEx](),

Be careful of Skype for Business and Skype personal – they don't like each other

Choose video calls over emailing

It becomes tempting to send a quick email whenever there is something to discuss. This can easily lead to misunderstandings and reduces team morale.

With virtual teams, video calls or, at least, regular calls you are more likely to avoid misunderstandings. Connect with your colleagues on a more personal level.

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Tips for running a virtual meeting

1. Prepare for the meeting: virtual meetings have to be planned out well in advance. Send the agenda ahead of time, create visuals to reinforce your message and forward them to everyone before the meeting.

Send log-in information (access codes, URLs, and call-in numbers) at least a day in advance so that participants can test for any software downloads needed.

You may also want to ask participants to log in at least 15 minutes prior to the start to test connectivity, or if very important – set up a test call a day ahead of time

Email invite – should include

- Agenda – include in agenda an introduction list
- Virtual meeting login details
- A method to reach you offline
- Any Ground Rules

If you are hosting a single presenter with a large audience tuning in, then it is a good idea to have a facilitator designated to assist the main presenter.

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Agenda tips

Start your agenda with an orientation of the virtual meeting environment

Keep the focus on one or two topics.

If you must cover more items, then give people time to stretch, take a bathroom break, or replenish their coffee.

Annotate each agenda item with the type of activity and length of time allocated, e.g:

- Presentation by xx (15 mins)
- Verbal update by xx
- Group Discussion
- Question and Answer Session

Keep each segment of the meeting short - no longer than 30 minutes.

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Set the ground rules

Online meeting attendees can call or log in from the local coffeehouse, airport lounges, home offices and anywhere else!

To minimize background or "road noise" (you don't want your child, pet, or ringing phones to become the focus)

Set the ground rules –

1. When you log on, please mute yourself
2. If you are able, please keep your video on, if you don't have enough bandwidth, then move to audio only
3. Like to ask a question – type QUESTION or COMMENT in chat, wait for the chair to invite you to speak (Or un-mute yourself, and say your name)

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Chairing a virtual meeting

1. Video-conference meetings should actually move at a slightly slower pace than a typical meeting due to a two to three second delay for most systems to communicate.

2. If you're leading the meeting, make sure there are sufficient pauses after asking a question.

3. Break the ice by going around the virtual room and asking everyone to introduce themselves and share something about their weekend, or talk about something they're looking forward to, to add a social element to the proceedings. "Everything you can simulate from face to face encounters is good."

4. Keep the audience engaged during the meeting, such as taking a poll or asking a question and asking for answers via chat.

5. Know your way around the software- find the 'mute all' button,

6. Ask questions frequently both to engage remote participants and to keep a personal connection going. Be explicit in your questions. Ask a specific **person a specific question**. Asking open-ended questions to a large remote audience will often result in "dead air" and then multiple people talking at once."

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Virtual Meetings Etiquette

1. The key to a successful video conference or phone conference meeting is to remember that you are in a meeting – no emailing – keyboard strokes sound transmit! Try not to eat or drink so that you can be prepared if questions are directed to you

2. Always assume when you log on that the microphones are already live

3. Check your background – remove anything distracting or family related! Blur your background on Teams

4. Striped shirts do not transmit well on camera nor does large, shiny jewelry. Both can be visually distracting. Try to keep your body movements to a minimum as excessive movement can actually degrade video quality.

5. Make eye contact by looking into the camera. It will make conversation among the participants more natural.

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Kit required for successful Virtual Meetings

Internet connection

Audio (from computer speakers or external speakers)

Microphone (from computer or external microphone)

Webcam (standalone or integrated with your monitor/laptop)

Larger groups may also need a projection screen or large TV monitor.

Note taking

OneNote

Write your own notes
Use dictation function
Use audio record
Can screen record in software
too

otter.ai

Set Otter Ai running
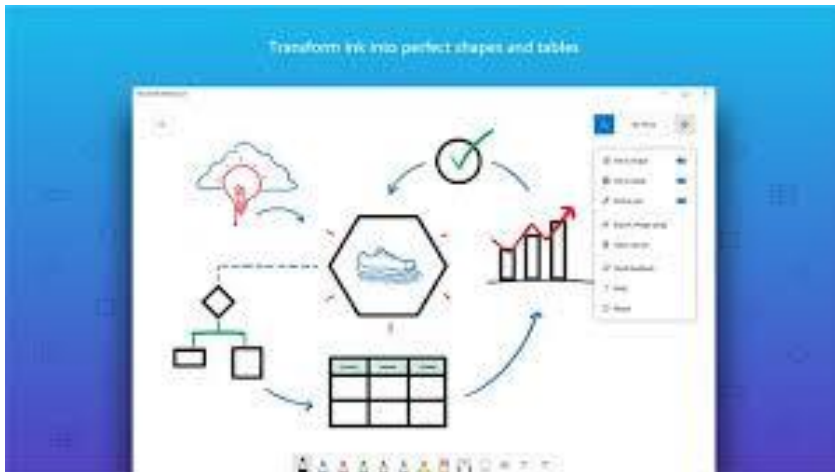Record all conversation and
convert to notes

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Collaboration tools

Create whiteboard or Google Drawing and share link inside email invite

Create OneNote Shared Notebook – share link inside email

Project Management tools

Use project management tools to keep actions on track and everyone aligned

Project management tools can be ideal to keep track of deadlines. They also send alerts and reminders for deadlines and give you a quick daily, weekly or monthly overview of what needs to be done, by who, and when. Things like Google Docs can still be a great addition and the same is valid for time tracking applications.

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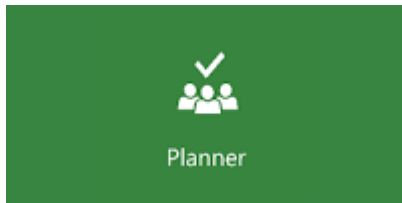
People Considerations

Find out how people work from home

Not everyone is cut out for remote work and not everyone works from home in the same way.

Use this as a chance to ask people how they work from home. Are they fixed and determined or easily distracted?

Work with your staff to help them create the right rules and environment to help them work at their best.

Some staff you may need to manage very closely, agree those parameters and help to develop their skills and self management.

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Create a professional work environment

Agree some rules – support the team in agreeing the rules together.

Professional attire and a distraction-free work environment are part of any corporate culture.

Additionally, setting professional standards contributes to being efficient and puts people in the right mindset.

Check on staff Health and Safety needs with their home office, check they have the right kit and space.

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Focus on outputs

Support staff to understand that you will be managing outputs.

You might want to set up reward systems to keep your team motivated and to better pinpoint the team members that can take on more responsibility.

Use timebox techniques to provide short completion times, to focus energy on completion.

Encourage staff to share their timeboxes in their calendars for easy viewing by all.

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Wellbeing support

Develop a system for wellbeing support

Book in wellbeing calls for staff and encourage them to share

- How working at home affects their mental health
- What is working well and not so well for them
- How they are getting on with their team-mates
- Deep dive into certain projects to identify any issues of avoidance or difficulty

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Communication and messaging

Timely communication is an important factor that supports businesses continuity at a time of crisis or uncertainty.

Think about your audience as being in two categories:

1. Internal:
- From board level to employees, communicate the message with clarity
- Develop a strategy for how and when information will be disseminated

2. External:

- Development of the message and strategy for circulating statements
- Prepare answers to questions that may follow from communications

Advice from: McQueenie Mulholland, Communications Agency
Details: https://mcmu.co.uk/communications/crisis/

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Other things to consider

If your business relies on foot-fall and face-to-face interaction with customers (such as retail, hospitality and services), being forced to close (due to weather or public health) can be very disruptive.

However, there are actions that you can take to ensure your business stays healthy and continues to deliver a positive outcome. Here are some thoughts:

1. **Virtualise your business:** consider how can you still deliver your product/service through the internet. Maybe you can set up a simple online shop?

2. **Sell vouchers to your services** – taking income now and delivering the service/product later.

3. **Keep in touch with your customers** and ensure they remain loyal to you. Use Social Media to provide a means of communication and sharing of great content.

4. Ensure you can **take payments online** (check out Paypal and other alternatives)

5. Use the time to **invest in your business**: innovate with new ideas.

6. **Do those jobs that you've been putting off for a "rainy day".**

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Support available

Contact the HOSW Growth Hub for up to date advice and support offerings for businesses in the South West

https://www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/

Signpost support services available for your business

Advice on Sick Pay changes and Grants

Advice on future workshops and support for you and your team

Growth Hub Supplier Database

For business support services

https://www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/supplier-database/

Exeter Chamber of Commerce

Exeter Chamber has pooled together resources and information

https://www.exeterchamber.co.uk/covid-19-coronavirus

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